

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7425

USIA WASHDC

INFO AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

CONFIDENTIAL ADDIS ABABA 0891

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SOPN, PEPR, ET, US

SUBJ: US MEDIA ON HORN OF AFRICA

REF: STATE 45038

1. RECOMMENDATION: WHILE RECOGNIZING VOA'S DESIRE TO
MAINTAIN MAXIMUM INDEPENDENCE FROM EXECUTIVE BRANCH EDITORIAL
DIRECTION, EMBASSY BELIEVES IT WOULD BE WORTHWHILE TO BRIEF
RESPONSIBLE VOA OFFICIALS ON NEW EMPHASIS IN USG POLICY
TOWARD CONFLICT IN HORN, I.E. MSG CONVEYED TO EPMG BY AARON.
BASIS FOR THIS RECOMMENDATION FOLLOWS:

2. WHEN POLCOUNS DELIVERED DEPT STATEMENT ON MILITARY SHIP-
MENTS TO ETHIOPIA FEB 22, MOFA DIRECTOR AMERICAN AFFAIRS
BERHANE DERESSE USED OCCASION TO POINT OUT RECENT EXAMPLES
OF WHAT HE TERMED BIASED REPORTING AGAINST ETHIOPIA ON PART
OF AMERICAN JOURNALISTS. HE MENTIONED WHITE HOUSE ANNOUNCE-
MENT REFERRING TO PMAC CHAIRMAN MENGISTU'S
ASSURANCES TO SPECIAL EMISSARY AARON THAT ETHIOPIA DOES NOT
INTEND TO CROSS SOMALI FRONTIER IN OGADEN CONFLICT. BERHANE
SAID THAT NEWS DESPATCHES HE HAD SEEN COUPLED THIS ANNOUNCE-
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MENT WITH REMINDER OF RECENT STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT CARTER
THAT SUCH A CROSSING WOULD CONSTITUTE THREAT TO WORLD
PEACE. IMPLICATION OF SUCH REPORTING IN BERHANE'S VIEW WAS
THAT MENGISTU WAS MAKING HIS ASSURANCE UNDER PRESSURE, WHEREAS
IN FACT HE AND OTHER TOP EPMG OFFICIALS HAD MADE SAME ASSUR-
ANCE ON SEVERAL PREVIOUS OCCASIONS. IT WAS JUST THIS KIND OF
REPORTING THAT RAISED QUESTIONS IN EPMG LEADERS' MINDS

REGARDING US INTENTIONS IN HORN. (EMBASSY NOTES FEB 21 WIRE-LESS FILE USES LANGUAGE SIMILAR TO THAT CRITICIZED BY BERHANE.)

3. BERHANE THEN REFERRED TO FEB 21 EVENING VOA BROADCAST AS FURTHER EVIDENCE OF US BIAS IN FAVOR OF SOMALIA. ACCORDING TO BERHANE, VOA REPORTING ON HORN DWELT ON ACTIVITIES OF WESTERN SOMALIA LIBERATION FRONT AND TENDED TO IGNORE FACT THAT INVASION WAS ENGINEERED AND BEING CARRIED OUT BY GOVERNMENT OF SOMALIA. HE ASKED IF EMBASSY COULD DO ANYTHING TO ASSURE MORE OBJECTIVE HANDLING OF WAR BY VOA, SO THAT "IT COULD MAINTAIN ITS REPUTATION OF BEING VOICE OF AMERICA AND NOT OF SOMALIA."

4. POLCOUNS SUGGESTED THAT EPMG ASSEMBLE COLLECTION OF TEXTS IT CONSIDERED TO BE OBJECTIONABLE AS BASIS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSIONS ON THIS SUBJECT. HE ALSO NOTED THAT VOA CORRESPONDENT IN NAIROBI WAS CURRENTLY SEEKING VISA TO PURSUE FIRST-HAND NEWS COVERAGE IN ETHIOPIA, AND THAT IT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO BRING "OFFENSIVE" BROADCAST MATERIAL DIRECTLY TO HIS ATTENTION, IF HE WERE ADMITTED.

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